



Main Messages from SPLASH-ERA-NET side event

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1 Background

SPLASH is the name of the European Union Water Research Area Network (EUWI ERA-Net), financed through the EC Framework Programme 6. Coordinated by DFID, it is a Consortium of 15 ministries, funding agencies and national research and development agencies from 11 countries in Europe. Its main objectives are to minimise duplication of research, identify areas where there are gaps, share good research management practice, resulting ultimately in joint research programmes.

Stockholm World Water Week is one of the largest events in the water and sanitation sector, attended by more than 1500 professionals from a huge range of European and Developing Countries.

SPLASH hosted a 'speed networking event' on the evening of Tuesday 14th August which provided a unique and fun experience for the 70 participants, at the same time allowing SPLASH to capture current thinking on how to enhance future water research. The evening was organized around five tables, each of which focussed the discussion of a specific question. Attendees joined one of the 20 minute discussions, before a bell signalled the move to a different table to meet another group of people and address another question. These covered topics such as research priorities, demand, improved dialogue, impact of research and capacity development. The main messages are presented in the following summary.

2 **Table 1: Does research really focus on the most pressing needs in the field of water for development?**

- The main focus areas of current water research identified in the session were: agriculture, climate change & water resources management, financing and sanitation marketing and water treatment.
- The most pressing needs in water research identified in the session were: governance and anti-corruption, education, capacity building, water supply and access to water, and use of sanitation facilities.
- There was overall agreement that funders of research, including policy makers, ministries and governmental agencies, set the water research agenda. Also the private sector influences the agenda. The MDGs have altered the research agenda globally. Universities do not set the research agenda and their role is limited to applying for funding. Local communities should also have a role in setting the research agenda.
- Dialogue (donors – policy makers – researchers), inclusion of stakeholders and establishing alliances were considered to be an essential means for directing the research agenda. The process in general should be more participatory.

3 Table 2: Do you agree that water research in the past has been too little led by demand from users?

- Most research is demand-led but it has to be based on the demand from the “right” stakeholders. Donors demand research on the basis of their policies whereas the demand of other stakeholders especially those in developing countries are more difficult to formulate, communicate and in the end, to meet. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have to be in place to know if research met the demand or not.
- The communication and capacity gap between research, policy and practice not only hinders the transfer of research results but also the transfer of demands for research. This especially holds true for transferring research outputs between developing countries and donor countries.
- Research is not sufficiently demand-led because researchers gain merit from journal publications and not necessarily from conducting research that is really demand-led.

4 Table 3: Do development policy makers listen to and incorporate research findings?

- Policy makers do not sufficiently listen to and incorporate research findings because of communication problems that in turn lead to a lack of understanding (even respect) between researchers and users; thereby creating barriers to the adoption of research findings.
- What can be done to ensure that policy makers listen to and incorporate research findings?
 - Involve policy makers (and any other target groups) in the formulation of the research agenda.
 - Greater clarity is needed on the “type” of research, the objectives and the purpose of the research:
 - Is it short term problem-solving research to answer specific policy-related questions so that policies can be adapted to be more effective? Outputs need to be rapidly available.
 - Or is it rather long term perspective research (“foresight”) to identify issues for future policy?
 - Outputs have to be carefully targeted and versioned to meet the requirements of the policy makers – generally they need to be concise and evidence-based. Potential policy actions need to be clearly identified. There is often a problem that outputs are too non-committal.
 - Communication of findings needs to be an objective of research projects.
 - “Mediators” or other intermediaries between researchers and policy advisors might be needed.
 - Governments (especially in the South) need to recognise and “believe” that their own national researchers can help solve local problems and have to invest in local capacity.

5 **Table 4: How can water for development research make a difference on the ground?**

- The communication problem between researchers and other stakeholders, specifically politicians and policy-makers, is the biggest challenge for water for development research to overcome to make a difference on the ground.
- Science communicators can play a key role in improving this communication. WSP Asia contributed a positive experience where science communicators were hired for supporting WSP activities in Laos and successfully communicated research results to politicians and other stakeholders in a comprehensible manner.
- The specific experience of others on similar topics should more often be considered as the basis for a new research programme/project.
- There needs to be a long term agenda, as research grants are often too limited to conduct research over a period of 3-5 years, which is needed to produce useable results.
- Researchers need to be present as much as possible “on the ground” in order to ensure continuous communication and information exchange with interest groups, politicians and other stakeholders.

6 **Table 5: Is it a matter of capacity-building – or are there other reasons for an insufficient transfer of research results into the policy planning process?**

- One reason for insufficient transfer is the communication gap, including:
 - a lack of personal communication skills:
 - permanent institutional linkages through which information can flow easily:
 - user-friendliness of the outputs produced by research:
 - available resources for communication of research findings; and
 - successful participation of stakeholders from developing and developed countries in the communication process.
- One reason for insufficient transfer of research results are the incentive structures for researchers and policy makers. Researchers are recognized and rewarded not only from journal publications and other researchers but from the extent to which they meet policy makers needs to address pressing problems like poverty reduction. If policy makers are involved in fund research from the beginning, they have a stronger incentive to use the results and to make sure that research meets their demand. If researchers produce results for the policy maker who is at the same time providing the funding, their incentives to meet the demand of the policy maker will be greater.

- One reason for insufficient transfer of research results is the different time perspectives/planning horizons between research and policy.
- A “third pillar” of intermediators is needed between research and policy. Not all research can be explained and applied in relation to policy. Therefore other scientists are needed to understand and summarise research results, analyse the policy options and transfer this into the policy making processes.